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What is Psychoanalysis and Management?

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What are the interdisciplinary intersections between psychoanalysis and management? The main argument in this working paper is that psychoanalysis has not only a theory of human subjectivity on offer, but makes it possible to understand and formalize a range of organizational phenomena in relation to unconscious processes. It also helps to identify the range of 'operative fantasies' with which employees make sense of their lives. The 'psychoanalysis of organizations' is therefore an important addition to the repertoire of cognitive tools and interpretative frameworks in management theory and practice. These tools and frameworks will make it possible to address organizational problems differently by teaching leaders to manage in a 'psychoanalytically informed manner'. Unconscious processes then are not reducible to clinical phenomena but are involved in organizational dynamics as well. This is evidenced by the notion of 'the geopolitical transference', where organizations and countries develop a signal-based relationship in terms of their domestic and foreign policies in a way that complements their respective interests through forms of symbolic identification of which they may or not be fully conscious, but which unconsciously determines their range of policy options. Psychoanalysis can also be used to help both managers and employees to 'work-through' the affects generated in the workplace in order to minimize the possibility of 'acting-out' unconscious conflicts in decision-making situations. Another important source of theoretical affinity between psychoanalysis and management is the preoccupation with the 'case' as a unit of cognition, and the relationship between the different forms of storytelling in academic, clinical, and organizational settings that constitute the 'case method' as an approach to scientific discovery, teaching, and research.

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